

FANTASTIC 1950s EC COMICS!



NO. 13
SEPT




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275
CANADA

SHOCK[®]

SUSPENSTORIES



JOLTING TALES OF
TENSION
IN THE
 **TRADITION!**

ONLY SKIN-DEEP

SHE STOOD IN THE CENTER OF THE SUNLIGHT-FILLED HOSPITAL ROOM, SMILING AT HIM, HER EYES FILLED WITH TEARS. SHE WAS A THING OF RADIANT BEAUTY, A VENUS IN MODERN DRESS. SOMEWHERE, DEEP INSIDE HIM, A MEMORY STIRRED, ALMOST CAME TO LIFE, THEN FADED AGAIN. SHE WAS PART OF IT, ALL RIGHT... PART OF THE PAST HE COULDN'T REMEMBER. HE STARED AT HER THROUGH THE NARROW SLITS IN THE BANDAGES THAT SWATHED HIS FACE. AS THE DOCTOR CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND HIM, LEAVING THEM ALONE, SHE WHISPERED...

YOU'LL REMEMBER, DARLING. I'LL MAKE YOU REMEMBER. THE DOCTOR SAYS IT'S TEMPORARY AMNESIA... THAT YOU CAN COME OUT OF IT... ANYTIME...

WHO...WHO ARE YOU? YOU LOOK FAMILIAR... AND YET...

SHE CROSSED THE ROOM TO HIS BED, TOOK HIS HAND IN HERS, PRESSED HER SOFT RED LIPS AGAINST THEM...

I'M GLORIA... SWEET. GLORIA ANDERS! WE WERE IN LOVE. TRY TO REMEMBER! YOU'RE ROBERT SICKLES. WE MET SIX MONTHS AGO. ONLY IT WAS SO IMPOSSIBLE. I WAS MARRIED.

MARRIED!? THEN YOUR HUSBAND...



SHE NODDED, LOOKING AROUND...

YES, MY HUSBAND WAS CHARLES ANDERS. HE WAS THE ONE WHO DIED IN THE ACCIDENT... THE ACCIDENT THAT CAUSED YOUR AMNESIA. WE KILLED HIM, BOB... YOU AND I. WE MURDERED CHARLES SO THAT WE COULD HAVE HIS INSURANCE... SO THAT WE COULD BE TOGETHER...

KILLED HIM!? I... I DON'T REMEMBER. MY FACE... IT WAS BURNED, THEY SAID.



SHE STROKED HIS HAIR SOFTLY,
CRADLING HIS HEAD AGAINST HER...

SOMETHING WENT
WRONG, DEAREST.
BUT THEY SAY YOU'LL
BE ALL RIGHT. I GAVE
THEM PICTURES. THEY
RECONSTRUCTED YOUR
FACE WITH PLASTIC
SURGERY.

ROBERT
SICKLES.
I... I JUST
CAN'T REMEM-
BER.



SHE LOOKED AT HIM HUNGRILY
AND HE KNEW THAT HE'D LOVED
THIS WOMAN. HIS HEART TOLD HIM...

IN A LITTLE WHILE,
THEY'RE GOING TO
REMOVE YOUR BAND-
AGES. THEN, YOU'RE
COMING HOME...
WITH ME.

I'D... I'D
LIKE
THAT,
GLORIA.



THERE WAS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.
THE DOCTOR CAME IN, SMILING...

WELL, MR. SICKLES.
READY FOR THE
UNVEILING?

READY,
DOC.



THE BANDAGES UNWOUND, LIKE TAPES FROM A CHILD'S
MAYPOLE... AROUND AND AROUND... UNTIL HE COULD FEEL
THE SUNLIGHT ON HIS FACE...

THERE
WE ARE...

OH, DOCTOR! IT'S
PERFECT! PERFECT!
YOU CAN HARDLY TELL
HE'D BEEN IN AN ACCIDENT.

A MIRROR!
GIVE ME A
MIRROR!



HE STARED AT HIMSELF IN THE LITTLE HAND MIRROR
GLORIA'D FISHED FROM HER BAG. THE DOCTOR HELD
UP AN ASSORTMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHS...

CARE TO CHECK
AGAINST THESE,
MR. SICKLES? MRS.
ANDERS SUPPLIED
US WITH THEM.

I CAN SEE, DOCTOR,
YOU DID A FINE JOB.
IT'S JUST THAT...
WELL... IT'S LIKE
SEEING YOUR
FACE FOR THE
FIRST TIME.

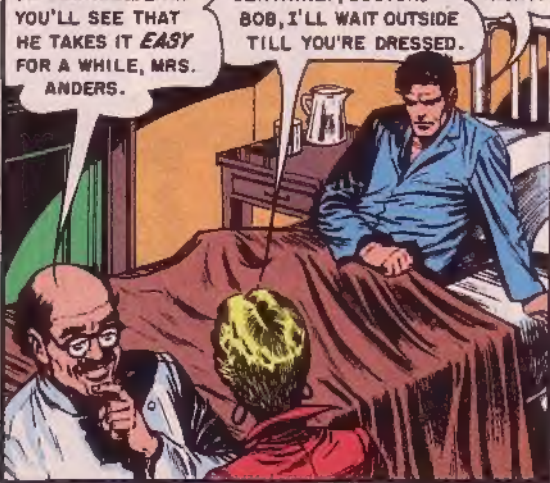
IS HE
FREE
TO GO
NOW,
DOCTOR?



OF COURSE... ER...
YOU'LL SEE THAT
HE TAKES IT EASY
FOR A WHILE, MRS.
ANDERS.

CERTAINLY, DOCTOR.
BOB, I'LL WAIT OUTSIDE
TILL YOU'RE DRESSED.

RIGHT!



GLORIA WENT OUT INTO THE HALL. THE DOCTOR
MOTIONED TO A CLOSET...

YOU'LL FIND ALL OF YOUR
CLOTHES IN THERE, MR. SICKLES.
MRS. ANDERS HAD THEM SENT
OVER. YOU'LL ALSO FIND A BOX
WITH THE CHARRED REMAINS
OF YOUR PERSONAL BELONGINGS...
YOUR WALLET... KEYS... THAT WE
FOUND IN YOUR POCKETS... THE SUIT
YOU WORE, OF COURSE WAS RUINED.

THANKS, DOC.
ER... THIS IS ALL
VERY EMBAR-
RASSING, BUT...
WELL... JUST
WHO IS MRS.
ANDERS?



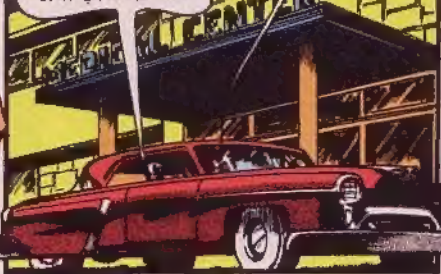
MR. ANDERS, THE MAN WHO DIED IN THE ACCIDENT, WAS A VERY CLOSE FRIEND OF YOURS, MR. SICKLE. HIS WIDOW, MRS. ANDERS, HAS BEEN MOST KIND. SHE IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT YOU. YOU'RE VERY LUCKY!

I... I GUESS I AM!



GLORIA WAS WAITING FOR HIM IN THE HALL. SHE LED HIM OUT OF THE HOSPITAL AND INTO THE STREET TO A WAITING CAR...

LIKE IT, HONEY? IT'S NEW. IT'S ALL YOURS. JUST TELL CHARLES'S INSURANCE ME WHERE MONEY PAID FOR IT. TO GO... DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DRIVE IT?



SHE SAT BESIDE HIM AS HE GUIDED THE NEW CAR OUT OF THE CITY...

YOU SAY WE KILLED YOUR HUSBAND?

WELL, TO BE PRECISE, YOU KILLED HIM. BUT LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT THAT NOW, BOB.



SHE SNUGGLED UP WARMLY AGAINST HIM, BRUSHING HER LIPS AGAINST HIS CHEEK...

LET'S TALK ABOUT US... WHAT WE'LL BE DOING IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS... WEEKS... MONTHS... YEARS...

I'D... LIKE TO TALK ABOUT IT, GLORIA. IT'S IMPORTANT. I'VE GOT TO KNOW! I'VE GOT TO REMEMBER.



GLORIA BEGAN. AS SHE SPOKE, HE TRIED TO PICTURE THE SCENE... TRIED TO RECALL IT... TRIED TO PULL IT FROM BEHIND THE BLACK CURTAIN THAT HUNG OVER HIS PAST...

YOU AND CHARLES BELONGED TO THE SAME CLUB. YOU WERE VERY GOOD FRIENDS. ABOUT SIX MONTHS AGO, CHARLES BROUGHT YOU HOME... FOR DINNER...



IT WAS THE FIRST TIME WE'D MET. WE FELL IN LOVE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. CHARLES NEVER KNEW. HE WAS COMPLETELY FOOLED. WE SAW EACH OTHER OFTEN AFTER THAT... EVERY CHANCE WE COULD. ONE DAY, WHEN CHARLES WAS OUT OF TOWN, I CALLED YOU... ASKED YOU TO COME TO THE HOUSE...

THIS IS CRAZY, GLORIA. WHAT IF SOMEONE SHOULD SEE ME HERE?

NO ONE WILL SEE YOU, AND CHARLES IS OUT OF TOWN. WELL, DON'T JUST STAND THERE. KISS ME...



THAT WAS THE DAY I TOLD YOU MY PLAN...

MURDER HIM, GLORIA? BUT WE'D BE CAUGHT!

NONSENSE! I'VE THOUGHT IT ALL OUT. NOW HERE'S WHAT YOU DO. MAKE SOME EXCUSE TO HAVE HIM DRIVE YOU OUT TO THE CLUB NEXT WEEK. TELL HIM YOUR CAR IS BEING REPAIRED.



'IT WAS A SIMPLE PLAN...'

THEN, WHEN YOU GET TO THE
TURN IN THE ROAD BY THE
DEEP RAVINE... MAKE HIM STOP...
KNOCK HIM UNCONSCIOUS... GET
OUT... PUSH THE CAR OVER INTO
THE RAVINE... AND THEN, TO
DESTROY ANY EVIDENCE, SET
FIRE TO THE CAR.



'...AND IT HAD A DOUBLE REWARD...'

CHARLES CARRIES A HUGE
INSURANCE POLICY, WITH
DOUBLE INDEMNITY. WE'LL
BE KILLING TWO BIRDS
WITH ONE STONE. WE'LL
BE RID OF HIM... AND...
WE'LL BE RICH...



**'YOU WERE A LITTLE WARY, BUT
I CONVINCED YOU...'**

DARLING... IT COULD BE **BABY...**
LIKE THIS ALWAYS...
NOT JUST THESE FEW
STOLEN MOMENTS.
SAY YOU'LL DO IT!



GLORIA SHRUGGED...

THAT'S IT! YOU TOOK OVER FROM THERE! THE
FOLLOWING WEEK, YOU CALLED... MADE THE APPOINT-
MENT... AND CHARLES LEFT TO
DRIVE YOU OUT. THAT'S ALL I
KNEW UNTIL I HEARD ABOUT
THE WRECK AND LEARNED THAT
YOU WERE IN IT, TOO!

I... I CAN'T
SEEM TO RECALL.
PERHAPS WHEN I
SET FIRE TO THE
CAR, THE GAS TANK...



HE SUDDENLY SHOUTED, HIS EYES WIDE...

THAT'S IT, GLORIA! I REMEMBER
SOMETHING! I REMEMBER THE GAS
TANK EXPLODING!

SEE, MONEY?
SEE? IT'LL
ALL COME
BACK... SOON.



**GLORIA GUIDED HIM TO A JUSTICE OF THE PEACE...
AND AFTER THE WEDDING CEREMONY, THEY DROVE
ON TO A DESERTED CABIN, DEEP IN THE WOODS...**

I RENTED THIS PLACE SO
WE'D BE ALONE, AND YOU'D
HAVE PEACE AND QUIET.

IT'S A LOVELY
PLACE, GLORIA.



**THAT EVENING, THEY SAT, CONTENTEDLY, BEFORE A ROARING
FIRE...**

YOU KNOW, GLORIA... WHEN I FIRST
SAW YOU THIS MORNING, I KNEW
I'D LOVED YOU BACK THEN...
BACK IN MY PAST, I LOVE YOU
NOW...

BOB, DARLING. IT WAS
WORTH IT... ALL OF
IT... JUST FOR THIS
DAY OF ECSTASY... LET
ALONE ALL OF THE
YEARS... AHEAD...



NIGHT SETTLED AROUND THE CABIN. HE LAY AWAKE, LISTENING TO HER QUIET BREATHING, INHALING HER SOFT PERFUME...

I... I CAN'T REMEMBER *ANY* OF THE INCIDENTS SHE TOLD ME, EXCEPT FOR THAT *EXPLOSION*. BUT... *WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?! I LOVE HER. I KNOW THAT! WHAT WE'VE DONE IS WRONG,* BUT WHAT CAN I DO? IF I *GAVE MYSELF UP TO THE POLICE, SHE'D BE PUNISHED TOO!*



HE ROSE YAWNING...

I NEED A *CIGARETTE... THAT'S* WHAT I NEED...



HE MOVED ACROSS THE DARKENED ROOM TOWARD THE DRESSER...



HE FLAILED...THE SCATTER-RUG SKIDDING OUT FROM UNDER HIM. AS HE FELL, HE STRUCK HIS HEAD...



GLORIA SAT UP, WIDE-EYED...

BOBBY?! THAT YOU? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?



HE STOOD OVER HER BED, HIS HANDS TENSED LIKE HUGE CLAWS...

I'M... ALL RIGHT... NOW... GLORIA!

BOBBY! I
EEE...



THE CLAWS SHOT DOWNWARD, GRIPPING GLORIA'S THIN WHITE NECK, CUTTING OFF HER SHRILL SCREAM... CUTTING OFF HER AIR... CUTTING OFF HER LIFE...

G-C-H-A...R...R...R-R-GH...



HE SAT WITH HIS HEAD BOWED UNDER THE BRILLIANT OVERHEAD LIGHT. THEY STOOD AROUND HIM, IN THE SHADOWS...THE DETECTIVES...THE DOCTOR...

BUT, WHY DID YOU KILL HER, SICKLES? EVEN IF YOUR MEMORY DID COME BACK... WHY KILL HER?

IT WAS JUST LIKE SEEING A MOVIE! I STRUCK MY HEAD AND IT FLASHED BEFORE MY EYES. I SAW IT ALL...



...AS IF I WAS THE AUDIENCE AT A PLAY. I SAW CHARLES, COMING HOME FROM A BUSINESS TRIP... UNEXPECTEDLY...LETTING HIMSELF INTO HIS HOUSE... HEARING...

WHEN YOU GET TO THE TURN IN THE ROAD BY THE DEEP RAVINE...MAKE HIM STOP...KNOCK HIM UNCONSCIOUS...GET OUT...PUSH THE CAR OVER INTO THE RAVINE...

GLORIA... CHOKES... AND BOB SICKLES!



'I SAW GLORIA AND BOB FROM AFAR...LIKE AN ONLOOKER PEERING THROUGH A WINDOW...'

CHARLES CARRIES A HUGE INSURANCE POLICY WITH DOUBLE INDEMNITY. WE'LL BE KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.



'I SAW CHARLES LET HIMSELF OUT, QUIETLY, AS...'

DARLING...IT COULD BE LIKE THIS ALWAYS... NOT JUST THESE FEW STOLEN MOMENTS. SAY YOU'LL DO IT!

BABY!



'AND I SAW HIM ANSWERING THE PHONE A WEEK LATER...'

CHARLIE? THIS IS BOB SICKLES. SAY, COULD YOU DO ME A FAVOR, CHARLIE?

SURE, BOB! WHAT IS IT?



'I SAW CHARLES ANDERS WALK INTO A TRAP, KNOWINGLY...'

IT'S REAL SWELL OF YOU TO DO THIS ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE, CHARLIE, BUT I MUST GET MY GLUBS. I'VE GOT AN IMPORTANT GAME TOMORROW AT MY CLIENT'S COURSE...

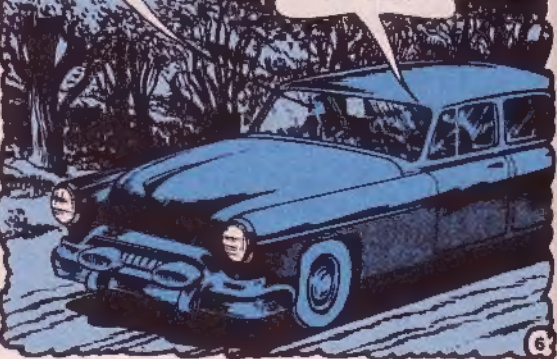
THINK NOTHING OF IT, BOB. GLAD TO DO IT...



'AND THEN I SAW WHY...'

YOU'RE...YOU'RE STOPPING, CHARLES! WHAT'S...WRONG?

SURPRISED, BOB? I KNEW YOU WOULD BE. WE HAVEN'T REACHED THE TURN, YET, HAVE WE? GET OUT! THIS IS A GUN!



'I SAW IT ALL, AS THOUGH I WERE WATCHING A T.V. SHOW. I SAW CHARLES FORCE BOB OUT OF THE CAR, AND DEMAND...'

TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES, BOB.

WHAT IS THIS, CHARLIE? WHAT'S THE IDEA?



'I HEARD THEIR ANGRY WORDS...'

I OVERHEARD YOUR PLANS TO KILL ME, BOB... YOURS AND MY LOVING WIFE'S. WELL, I AM GOING TO DIE... SHE'LL THINK! ONLY IT WILL BE YOU... WITH MY IDENTIFICATION...



AND WON'T SHE BE SURPRISED WHEN I SHOW UP, INSTEAD OF YOU, AFTER THE INSURANCE COMPANY HAS PAID OFF.

IT WAS ALL HER IDEA, CHARLIE! REALLY! I...I...



OH, DON'T WORRY, BOB, SHE WON'T LIVE LONG EITHER. AND AFTER I KILL HER, I'M GOING TO GIVE MYSELF UP TO THE POLICE.



I WATCHED THEM EXCHANGE CLOTHES AND IDENTIFICATION. THEN I SAW CHARLES LIFT THE GUN MUZZLE AND BRING IT DOWN ON BOB'S HEAD...



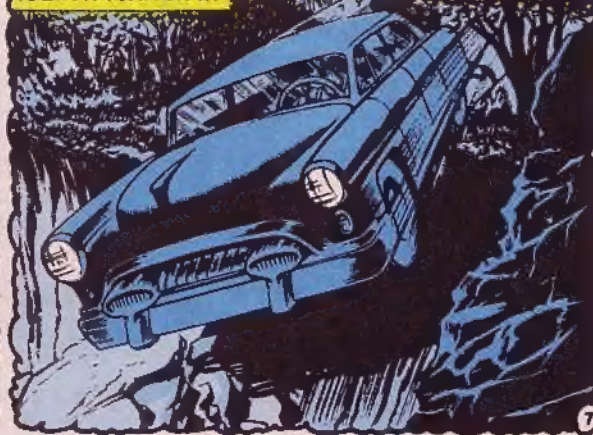
THE VICTIM BECAME THE VICTOR. I SAW CHARLES DRAG BOB'S UNCONSCIOUS BODY BACK INTO THE CAR...



I SAW THE CAR DRIVE TO THE EDGE OF THE RAVINE. SAW CHARLES GET OUT...



... SAW THE CAR GO OVER AND OVER WITH BOB'S BODY INSIDE... DRESSED IN CHARLES'S CLOTHES, WITH CHARLES'S IDENTIFICATION...



'I SAW CHARLES SCURRY DOWN INTO THE RAVINE TOWARD THE SMASHED CAR...WATCHED HIM STRIKE A MATCH...'



'...WATCHED HIM TOSS IT TOWARD THE GASOLINE-SOAKED WRECK...HEARD THE EAR-SPLITTING EXPLOSION THAT FOLLOWED...'



'...SAW THE SUDDEN SHEET OF FLAME THAT SHOT ALONG THE SPILLED GASOLINE STREAM BEFORE CHARLES, ENVELOPING HIM...BURNING...SCORCHING...CHARRING...'



HE SAT WITH HIS HEAD BOWED UNDER THE BRILLIANT OVERHEAD LIGHT. THEY STOOD AROUND HIM, BACK IN THE SHADOWS...THE DETECTIVES...THE DOCTOR...

I SAW IT ALL, IN THAT FLASH, WHEN I **STRUCK MY HEAD**, AND MY **MEMORY** RETURNED...

SO YOU **KILLED HER!**



YES. WHAT **GLORIA** DIDN'T KNOW, AND WHAT **YOU** DIDN'T KNOW, AND WHAT **I** DIDN'T KNOW...UNTIL I **STRUCK MY HEAD**...WAS...



...**BOB SICKLES** DIED IN THAT **BURNING CAR**. I **KILLED HIM!** SINCE YOU FOUND **MY** IDENTIFICATION ON **HIS** BODY, YOU **NATURALLY** THOUGHT IT WAS **ME**. AND...



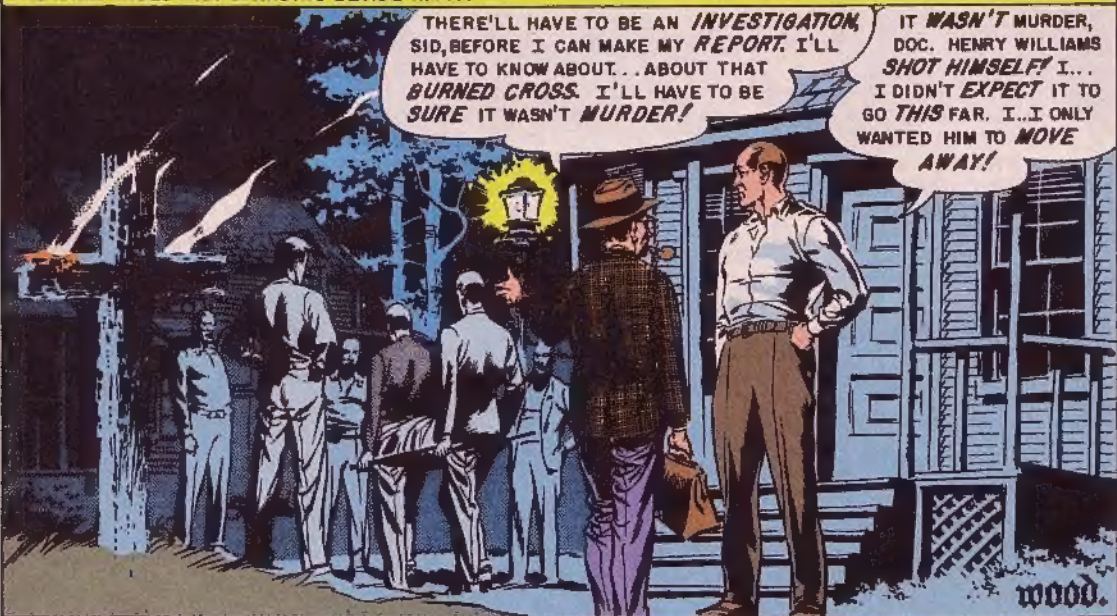
...AND SINCE YOU FOUND **BOB SICKLES'** IDENTIFICATION ON **MY** BURNED BODY, YOU **NATURALLY** THOUGHT **I** WAS **BOB SICKLES**. WHEN YOU **CONTACTED** MY WIFE SHE BROUGHT **HIS** PHOTOGRAPHS AND THE **DOC** GAVE ME **HIS FACE!** BUT I THINK, AS I WAS **KILLING** HER, **GLORIA** **REALIZED** I WAS **REALLY** HER **HUSBAND**, **CHARLES ANDERS!**



THE
END

BLOOD-BROTHERS

A LAST FAINT WHISP OF SMOKE CURLED UPWARD FROM THE BLACKENED AND CHARRED CROSS THAT STILL STOOD GROTESQUELY UPON THE SINGED LAWN AS THEY BROUGHT THE BODY OUT. OLD DOC FALK, THE CORONER WHO HAD DRIVEN OVER FROM THE COUNTY SEAT TO SIGN THE DEATH CERTIFICATE, WATCHED AS THE DRAPED STRETCHER WAS MOVED THROUGH THE GAPIING SILENT CROWD TO THE MORGUE WAGON. HE SHOOK HIS HEAD. HE LOOKED UP AT THE GRIM FACED MAN STANDING BESIDE HIM...



THERE'LL HAVE TO BE AN **INVESTIGATION**, SID, BEFORE I CAN MAKE MY **REPORT**. I'LL HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT... ABOUT THAT **BURNED CROSS**. I'LL HAVE TO BE **SURE** IT WASN'T **MURDER**!

IT **WASN'T** MURDER, DOC. HENRY WILLIAMS **SHOT HIMSELF**! I... I DIDN'T **EXPECT** IT TO GO **THIS FAR**. I... I ONLY WANTED HIM TO **MOVE AWAY**!

YOU WANTED HIM TO **MOVE AWAY**, SID? **WHY?** I THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE SUCH **GOOD FRIENDS**. SHUCKS, WHEN I WAS APPOINTED CORONER AND MOVED OVER TO THE COUNTY SEAT, YOU AND HENRY WERE LIKE...

I **FOUND OUT** A FEW THINGS SINCE THEN, DOC. THINGS I DIDN'T **LIKE**. THINGS THAT MADE A **DIFFERENCE**...



THE MORGUE WAGON MESHED GEARS AND ROARED OFF. THE CROWD BEGAN TO BREAK UP. DOC FALK STUDIED THE GRIM FACED MAN BESIDE HIM...

YOU BETTER **TELL ME** ABOUT IT, SID. IT'LL **ALL** COME OUT AT THE **INQUEST**, ANYWAY.

WELL, DOC, IT ALL **BEGAN** WHEN **JED MARTIN** PUT HIS **HOUSE** UP FOR SALE. **JED LIVES OVER THERE...** **ACROSS THE STREET...**



JED'D HAD THE PLACE ON THE MARKET FOR A FEW MONTHS WHEN A RUMOR STARTED. ELLA, MY WIFE, HEARD IT FROM MRS. MORGAN AND SHE TOLD ME...

THAT'S RIGHT. AND HE'S *CONSIDERING* IT, TOO! THEY OFFERED HIM A *GOOD PRICE*...

WE CAN'T LET THAT *HAPPEN*, ELLA. WE JUST CAN'T...

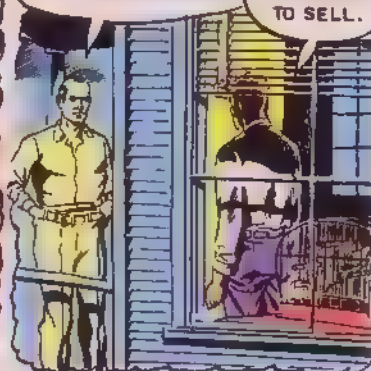
THAT NIGHT, I WENT NEXT DOOR TO SEE HENRY. I TOLD HIM THE NEWS!

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT *JED MARTIN*, HENRY? HE'S HAD AN *OFFER* TO *BUY HIS PLACE*...

WHY THAT'S *SWELL!* HE'S BEEN *ANXIOUS* TO *SELL*.

SWELL!? IT'S *BAD*... *VERY BAD*, HENRY. WE'VE GOT TO TALK HIM *OUT OF ACCEPTING* IT! HE'S HAD AN *OFFER* FROM A *NEGRO* *FAMILY*.

OH?? WELL, *WHAT'S* *WRONG* WITH *THAT*?



WHAT'S *WRONG*? WELL, FOR *CRYIN' OUT LOUD*, HENRY! IF A *NEGRO* *FAMILY* *MOVES* INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD, THERE'LL BE *OTHERS* *FOLLOWING*, AND *PRETTY SOON*.

BUT, THERE *ARE* *OTHERS*, *SID*!

...THE *REAL ESTATE* *VALUES* *WILL* *DROP* *TO* *NOTHING* *AND...* *AND...* *HUNP* *DID* *YOU* *SAY...* *THERE* *ARE* *OTHERS*?

DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT *I'M* *PART* *NEGRO*, *SID*?



YOU... YOU... *AW, QUIT THE CLOWNING*, HENRY! I'M *SERIOUS*! IF WE *LET* A *NEGRO* *FAMILY*...

I'M *NOT* *CLOWNING*, *SID*! MY *GRANDMOTHER* WAS A *NEGRO*! SO YOU *SEE*, I'M *PART* *NEGRO*...

WHY... *WHY* *DIDN'T* *YOU* *EVER* *TELL* *ME*? I *MEAN*, I *NEVER*... I...

I *DIDN'T* *TELL* *YOU* *BECAUSE* I *DIDN'T* *THINK* *IT* *WAS* *IMPOR-* *TANT*, *SID*!



THE CROWD HAD GONE OFF INTO THE SILENT DARKNESS, NOW. SID AND OLD DOC FALK STOOD ALONE BEFORE THE EMPTY HOUSE WITH THE BURNED CROSS ON THE FRONT LAWN...

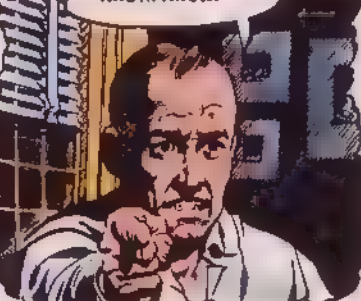
AT FIRST, I WAS **SHOCKED**, DOC... **BEWILDERED!** IMAGINE! MY OWN NEIGHBOR... MY FRIEND WITH **NEGRO BLOOD** IN HIS VEINS...



'LATER THAT NIGHT, I TOLD ELLA...' THAT WAS A **ROTTEN TRICK**, ELLA... HIM LIVING HERE **ALL THESE YEARS** AND NEVER **TELLING** US!



I DON'T **KNOW!** HE SAID HE DIDN'T THINK IT WAS **IMPORTANT!** BUT IT **IS** IMPORTANT, ELLA. WITH **HIM** LIVING HERE, AND **JED MARTIN** THINKING OF SELLING **HIS** PLACE TO **COLORED FOLKS**. WHY. WHY, THE **NEIGHBORHOOD'S** GONNA **CHANGE!** OUR **KIDS** WILL BE **PLAYIN'** WITH **COLORED KIDS**... AND... AND...



'THEN I GOT ANGRY, DOC...' I'M NOT GOING TO LET THAT **HAPPEN**, ELLA. I PUT A LOT OF **MONEY** AND **WORK** AND **SWEAT** INTO **THIS** PLACE. I'M **NOT** GOING TO SEE IT **GO DOWN** THE DRAIN. THIS IS OUR **HOME**... IN A **DECENT** NEIGHBORHOOD! NOBODY'S GOING TO **RUIN** IT FOR US! **NOBODY!**



'I WENT TO SEE JED MARTIN' THERE'S A **RUMOR** AROUND THAT YOU **MIGHT** SELL YOUR PLACE TO A **NEGRO** FAMILY, JED! I **HOPE** IT ISN'T **TRUE!**



I **DID** GET AN **OFFER**, SID... BUT I WOULDN'T **DO** THAT TO YOU AND THE **REST** OF THE **FOLKS!** NO, I'M **NOT SELLIN'**... NOT TO **THEM**... NOT IF **FOLKS** AROUND **HERE** DON'T **WANT** ME TO!



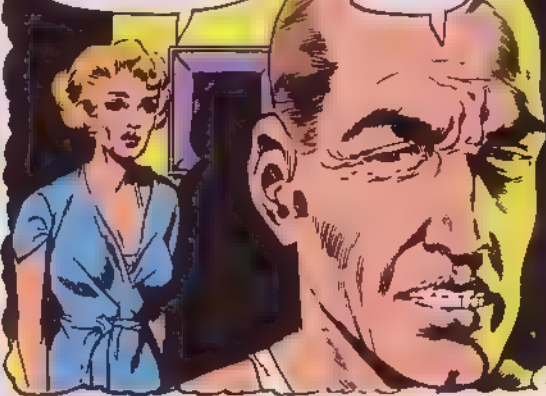
'WITH JED TAKEN CARE OF, I STARTED BROODING ABOUT HENRY WILLIAMS, MY PART-NEGRO NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR...'

WHAT'S **WRONG**, SID? I'M THINKING ABOUT THE **WILLIAMS'S** ELLA. I'M THINKING ABOUT **US** LIVING NEXT TO A **FAMILY** WITH **NEGRO BLOOD**. I'M THINKING ABOUT MAYBE IT'D BE **BETTER** IF THEY **MOVED** AWAY!



MOVE AWAY? BUT, **HOW** WILL YOU MAKE THEM DO THAT SID, IF THEY DON'T **WANT** TO?

THEY'LL **WANT** TO, ELLA... WHEN I'M **THROUGH!** YOU'LL **SEE!**



LITTLE FLECKS OF WHITE ASH
FELL AWAY FROM THE CRUDE
CHARRED CROSS STANDING ON THE
SINGED LAWN. SID STARED AT IT
AS HE SPOKE...

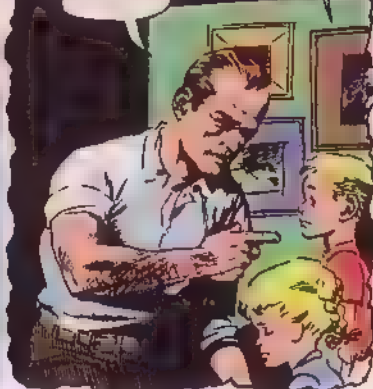
SO I STARTED MY CAMPAIGN,
DOC. I WAS GOING TO GET RID
OF HENRY WILLIAMS AND HIS
FAMILY, NO MATTER WHAT.



'I WARNED MY KIDS...

... SO IF I CATCH EITHER
ONE OF YOU PLAYING
WITH THE WILLIAMS
KID, I'LL TAN YOUR
HIDES.

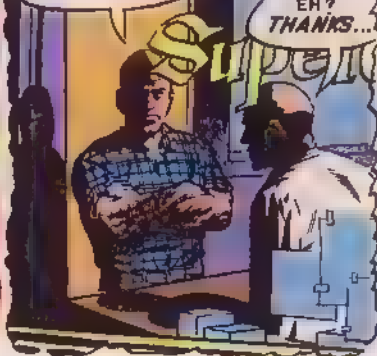
YES,
POPPA!



'I SPOKE TO PEOPLE...

OF COURSE, IF YOU WANT
TO DEAL WITH COLORED
FOLKS, THAT'S OKAY
WITH ME, ONLY I'LL
TAKE MY BUSINESS
ELSEWHERE!

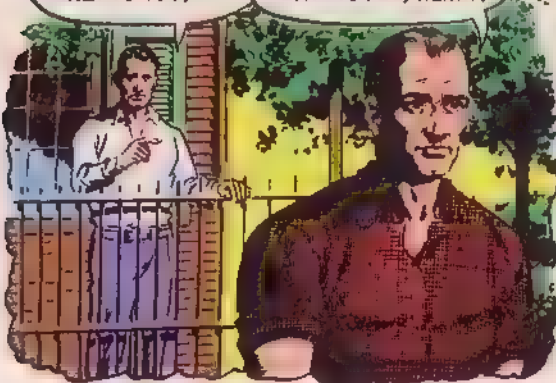
I
UNDER-
STAND,
SID!
NEGRO
BLOOD,
EH?
THANKS...



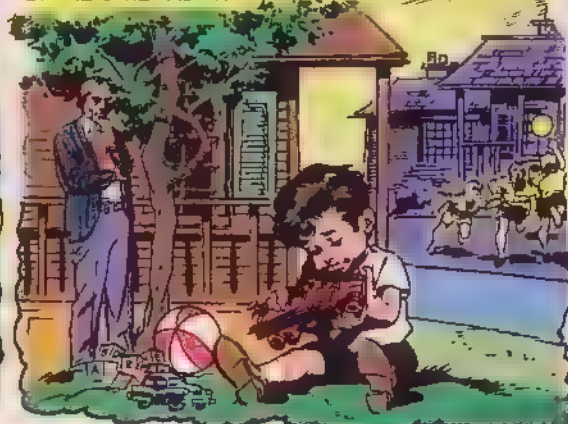
'I HAD A FENCE PUT UP BETWEEN HENRY'S PROPERTY
AND MINE...

SID, I'D LIKE TO
TALK TO YOU!

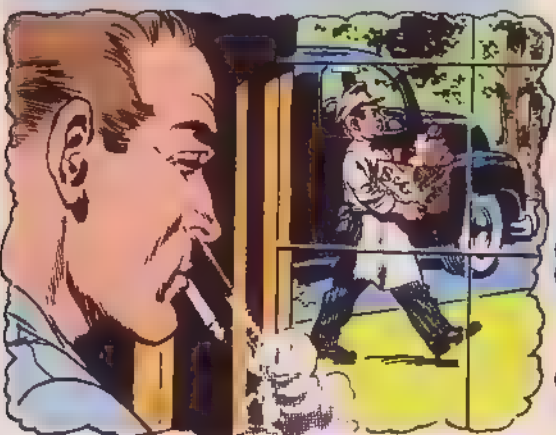
I GOT NOTHING TO
SAY TO YOU, HENRY!



'AND I WAITED. BUT HENRY DIDN'T TAKE THE HINT, I
GUESS. I WATCHED HIS KID, PLAYING BY HIMSELF, SPURNED
BY THE OTHER KIDS...



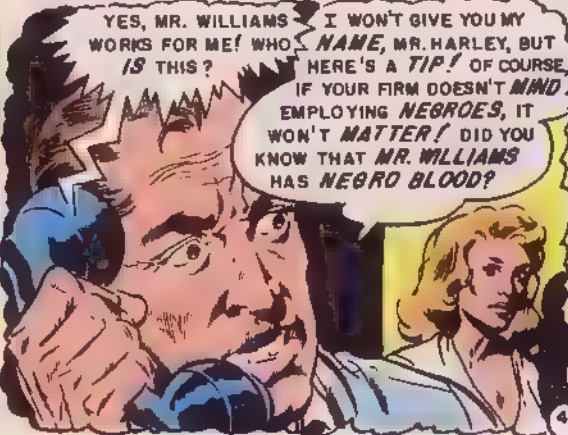
'AND I WATCHED HIS GROCERY ORDERS COME FROM
STORES THAT DIDN'T MIND DEALING WITH HIS KIND...



'SO I MADE A PHONE CALL. I CALLED HENRY WILLIAMS'
EMPLOYER...

YES, MR. WILLIAMS
WORKS FOR ME! WHO
IS THIS?

I WON'T GIVE YOU MY
NAME, MR. HARLEY, BUT
HERE'S A TIP! OF COURSE,
IF YOUR FIRM DOESN'T MIND
EMPLOYING NEGROES, IT
WON'T MATTER! DID YOU
KNOW THAT MR. WILLIAMS
HAS NEGRO BLOOD?



...AND THAT NIGHT, I WATCHED FROM MY WINDOW AS HENRY WILLIAMS CAME HOME WITH HIS SEVERANCE PAY IN HIS POCKET AND NO JOB TO GO TO THE NEXT DAY...



I WATCHED FOR THE 'FOR SALE' SIGN, BUT NONE APPEARED. ONE DAY, I HEARD THE GROCERY DELIVERY MAN WARN HENRY!

YOU PAY UP WHAT YOU OWE, MR. WILLIAMS, AND I'LL BRING YOUR ORDERS. UNTIL THEN, NOT ONE MORE CENT CREDIT!

YOU'LL GET YOUR MONEY! I SWEAR IT! JUST AS SOON AS I LAND A JOB!



AND THEN SARAH... MRS. WILLIAMS... GOT SICK, AND HENRY WENT TO THE BANK TO BORROW MONEY SO SHE COULD HAVE PROPER MEDICAL CARE. ONLY I'D SPOKEN TO MR. WALTERS AT THE BANK. I'D WARNED HIM...

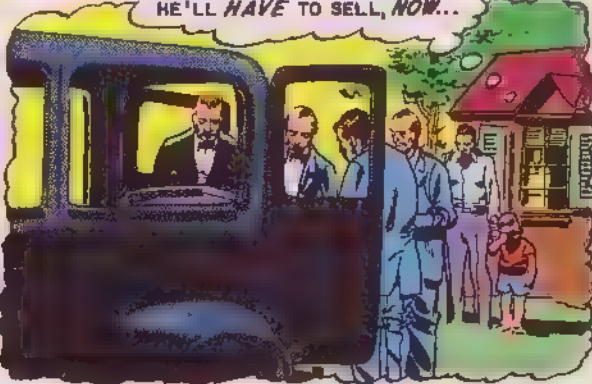
SORRY, MR. WILLIAMS. YOU'RE NOT A VERY GOOD CREDIT RISK. I'D LIKE TO HELP YOU, ONLY...

I UNDERSTAND, MR. WALTERS!



AFTER SARAH DIED, I WATCHED THEM CARRY THE WICKER OUT TO THE WAITING HEARSE. I HEARD THE PITIFUL SOB-BING OF HENRY'S KID. AND I FELT NO COMPASSION...

HE'LL HAVE TO SELL, NOW...

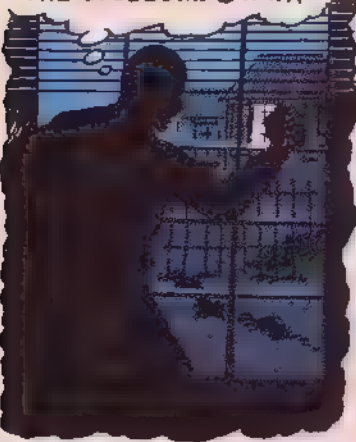


BUT HENRY STILL DIDN'T SELL. HE SENT HIS KID OFF TO LIVE WITH RELATIVES AND LOCKED HIMSELF UP IN HIS HOUSE...

SO TONIGHT, EARLIER, I PUT THE CROSS ON HENRY'S LAWN, AND LIT IT... WATCHED IT FLARE UP...

I SAW HENRY'S FACE AT THE WINDOW, STARING OUT AT THE DANCING FLAMES! CAN YOU IMAGINE?! EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NEGRO BLOOD IN HIS VEINS, HIS FACE WAS ASHEN WHITE...

THE STUBBORN @ # * ! !



HALF OF THE CHARRED ARM OF THE CROSS FELL TO THE GROUND WITH A SIGHING CRACKING SOUND. SID SHOOK HIS HEAD...

I NEVER EXPECTED HIM TO SHOOT HIMSELF, DOC. I ONLY WANTED HIM TO PACK OFF.

PEOPLE DO UNEXPECTED THINGS, SID!

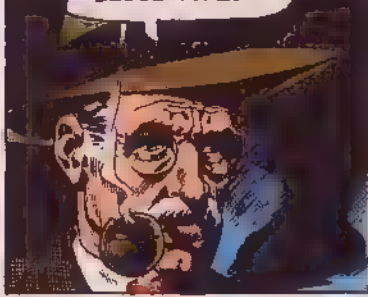


I NEVER WOULD HAVE EXPECTED YOU TO DO WHAT YOU DID... DRIVE HENRY WILLIAMS TO SUICIDE!

HENRY HAD NEGRO BLOOD IN HIM, DOC! CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND?



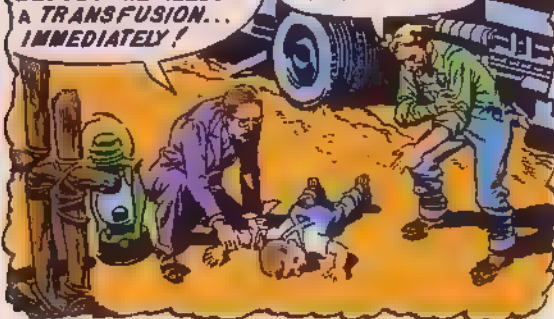
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS NEGRO BLOOD, SID. ALL HUMAN BLOOD IS THE SAME, WHETHER IT IS THE BLOOD OF AN ORIENTAL, OR AN AFRICAN, OR AN EUROPEAN. EXCEPT FOR ONE MEDICAL DIFFERENCE... THE BLOOD TYPE. BUT WHITE, NEGRO, MONGOL, ALL RACES OF MAN HAVE ALL THE BLOOD TYPES...



'I REMEMBER ONCE, WHEN I FIRST STARTED PRACTICING MEDICINE, I WAS CALLED OUT TO A FARM. THE FARMER'S LITTLE BOY HAD BEEN BADLY HURT BY A THRESHER. HE'D ALMOST SEVERED HIS ARM. BY THE TIME I GOT THERE

HE'S LOST A LOT OF BLOOD! HE NEEDS A TRANSFUSION... IMMEDIATELY!

HERE! I'LL GIVE IT TO HIM...



'I CHECKED THE FATHER'S BLOOD, BUT IT WAS THE WRONG TYPE. THEN I CHECKED THE MOTHER'S...

NEITHER OF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT BLOOD TYPE. MINE ISN'T RIGHT, EITHER. AND IF YOUR BOY DOESN'T GET A TRANSFUSION FAST... HE'LL DIE...

GEORGE! COME IN HERE!



GEORGE WAS THE FARMER'S HIRED HAND. HE WAS A HUGE MAN... STRONG AND MUSCULAR. GEORGE WAS A NEGRO...

CHECK HIS TYPE, DOC!

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVE, GEORGE!



GEORGE'S BLOOD WAS THE SAME TYPE AS THE BOY'S...

GEORGE! WILL YOU DO IT? WILL YOU GIVE MY SON THE BLOOD HE NEEDS?

HE'LL DIE IF YOU DON'T, GEORGE. PLEASE...



THE OTHER HALF OF THE CROSS-ARM
DROPPED TO THE GROUND, STIRRING
UP LITTLE FLAKES OF ASH...

THE NEGRO SAVED THE
BOY'S LIFE, SID. HE
GAVE THE BOY OVER A
QUART OF BLOOD!

DON'T
PREACH
TO ME
DOC.



ROLL UP YOUR
SLEEVE, SID!

HUH?
WHY?



ROLL UP YOUR
SLEEVE!

LOOK, DOC...
I... OH, WELL!



THE TALL MAN WITH THE GRIM FACE ROLLED UP HIS
SLEEVE. OLD DOC FALK TOOK HIS ARM AND LED HIM
TO THE STREET LAMP...



HMMMM! I DID A
PRETTY GOOD JOB,
EVEN IF I DO SAY SO
MYSELF!

YOU?

THE COUNTRY CORONER POINTED TO THE THIN WHITE
LINE CIRCLING SID'S MUSCULAR FOREARM...

THAT'S THE SCAR THE
THRESHING MACHINE
LEFT ON YOUR ARM, SID,
WHEN YOU ALMOST SEVERED
IT OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
AGO.

I!? THEN
THE BOY...



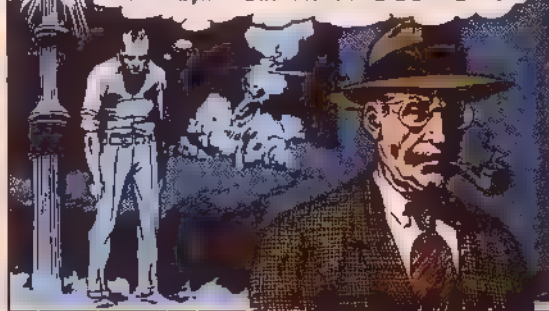
YOU WERE THAT BOY, SID! GEORGE'S
BLOOD SAVED YOUR LIFE. 'NEGRO
BLOOD,' PUMPED INTO YOUR VEINS,
SNATCHED YOU FROM THE JAWS OF
DEATH!

OH, GOD...



THE CORONER SHOOK HIS HEAD AND WALKED AWAY. SID
JUST STOOD THERE, THE TEARS STREAMING DOWN HIS
CHEEKS...

OH GOD,...SOB...WHAT HAVE I DONE...?

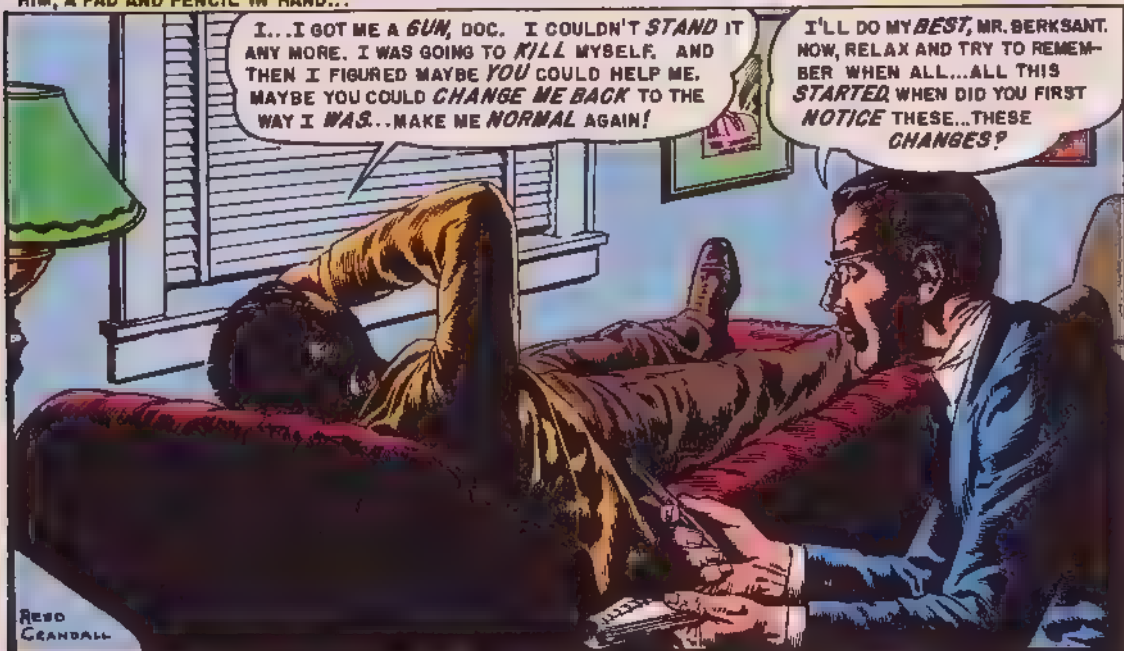


AND ON THE SINGED LAWN, THE CHARRED UPRIGHT, THE
REMAINS OF THE BURNED CROSS, COLLAPSED INTO A
PILE OF ASH AND CARBON...

THE END

UPON REFLECTION

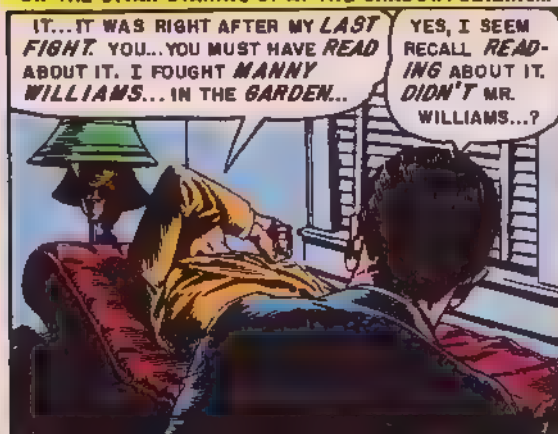
THE PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE WAS DIMLY LIT AND THE TRAFFIC NOISES OUTSIDE WERE ALMOST INAUDIBLE. JOEY LAY ON THE SOFT LEATHER COUCH TREMBLING, HIS VOICE ONLY A HOARSE WHISPER. THE PSYCHIATRIST SAT BESIDE HIM, A PAD AND PENCIL IN HAND...



I... I GOT ME A **GUN**, DOC. I COULDN'T **STAND** IT ANY MORE. I WAS GOING TO **KILL** MYSELF. AND THEN I FIGURED MAYBE **YOU** COULD HELP ME. MAYBE YOU COULD **CHANGE ME BACK** TO THE WAY I **WAS**... MAKE ME **NORMAL** AGAIN!

I'LL DO MY **BEST**, MR. BERKSANT. NOW, RELAX AND TRY TO REMEMBER WHEN ALL...ALL THIS **STARTED** WHEN DID YOU FIRST **NOTICE** THESE...THESE **CHANGES**?

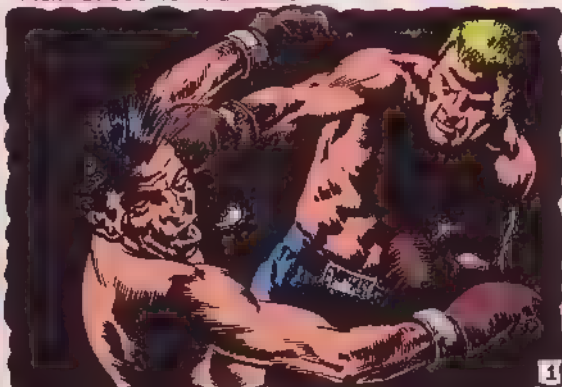
JOEY BERKSANT, NUMBER ONE CONTENDER FOR THE MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP, SIGHED. HE LAY BACK ON THE DIVAN STARING UP AT THE SHADY CEILING...



IT...IT WAS RIGHT AFTER MY **LAST FIGHT**. YOU...YOU MUST HAVE **READ** ABOUT IT. I FOUGHT **MANNY WILLIAMS**... IN THE **GARDEN**...

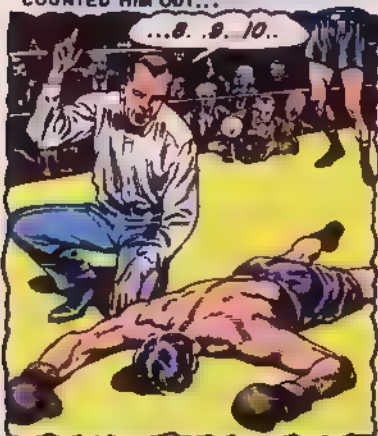
YES, I SEEM RECALL **READING** ABOUT IT. **DIDN'T** MR. WILLIAMS...?

"**YEAH**, DOC. **MANNY** DIED. **I KILLED HIM**. IT WAS IN THE EIGHTH ROUND. I'D BEEN **LANDING** MY LEFT JAB PRETTY REGULARLY AND **MANNY**'D GOTTEN GLASSY-EYED AND GROGGY. HE OPENED UP AND I CAUGHT HIM WITH A **RIGHT CROSS** TO THE HEAD..."



'MANNY WENT DOWN, KINDA LIKE A SNOW-MAN MELTING... FOLDING UP, SORT OF, IN A HEAP. THE REF COUNTED HIM OUT...'

...8.. 9.. 10..



'BUT MANNY DIDN'T GET UP. THE COMMISSION DOCTOR CLIMBED INTO THE RING AND LOOKED HIM OVER...'

THIS... THIS MAN IS DEAD!

GOOD LORD!



'I FELT ALL SICK INSIDE SOMEHOW, THEY GOT ME THROUGH THE JEERING CROWD TO MY DRESSING ROOM...'

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE HIT HIM SO HARD, JOEY! YOU...

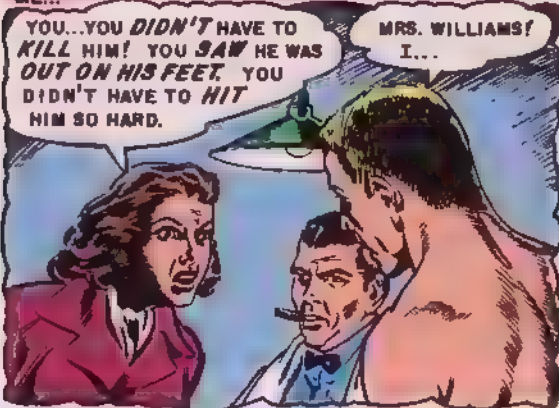
I COULDN'T HELP IT, NICKY! I WAS FIGHTIN' TO WIN! I HAD TO...



'AND THAT'S WHEN MANNY'S WIFE CAME INTO THE DRESSING ROOM. SHE WAS WHITE AS A GHOST AND HER EYES WERE FILLED WITH TEARS. SHE JUST STARED AT ME...'

YOU... YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO KILL HIM! YOU SAW HE WAS OUT ON HIS FEET. YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO HIT HIM SO HARD.

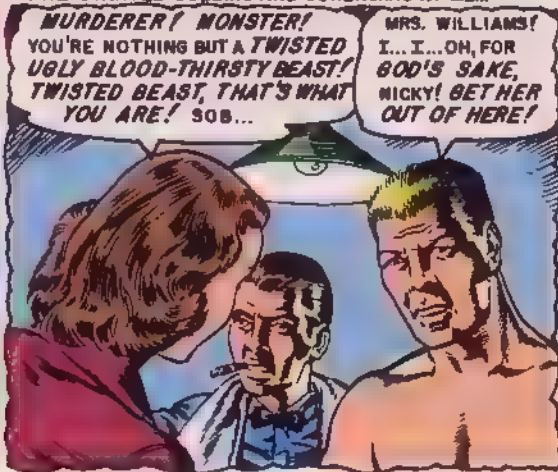
MRS. WILLIAMS! I...



'SHE STARTED SOBING AND SCREAMING AT ME...'

MURDERER! MONSTER! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A TWISTED UGLY BLOOD-THIRSTY BEAST! TWISTED BEAST, THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE! SOB...

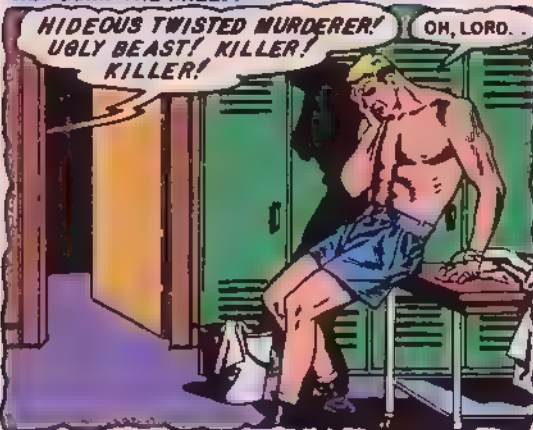
MRS. WILLIAMS! I... I... OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE, NICKY! GET HER OUT OF HERE!



'THEY DRAGGED HER OUT, AND I COULD HEAR HER SCREAMING VOICE BRUICKING AT ME AS THEY TOOK HER DOWN THE HALL...'

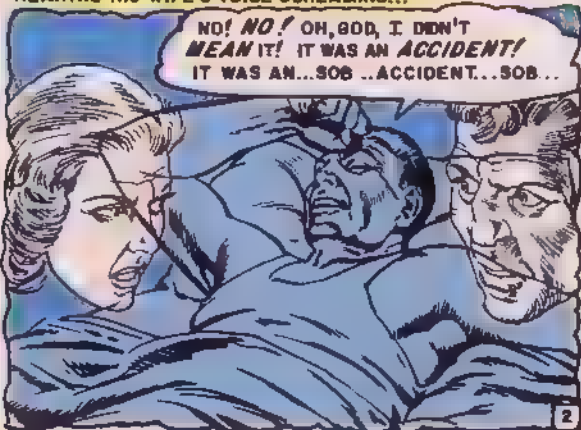
HIDEOUS TWISTED MURDERER! UGLY BEAST! KILLER! KILLER!

OH, LORD...




'I COULDN'T SLEEP THAT NIGHT, DOC! I KEPT SEEING MANNY'S GLASSY EYES STARING AT ME.. AND I KEPT HEARING HIS WIFE'S VOICE SCREAMING...'

NO! NO! OH, GOD, I DIDN'T MEAN IT! IT WAS AN ACCIDENT! IT WAS AN... SOB... ACCIDENT... SOB...

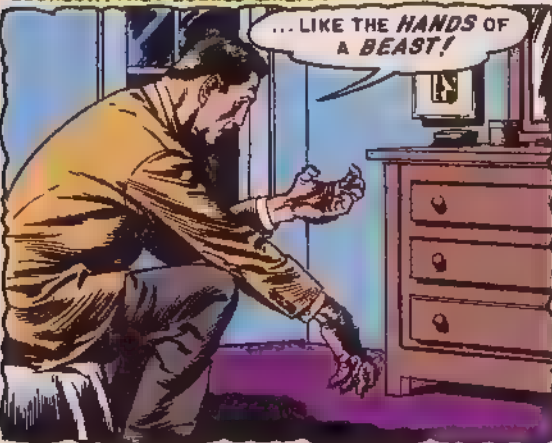


'IT WAS THE NEXT MORNING WHEN I GOT UP THAT I FIRST NOTICED MY **HANDS**. THEY'D **CHANGED** DURING THE NIGHT. THEY'D **CONTORTED** AND **SHRIVELED** AND GROWN **UGLY** AND **TWISTED**...'



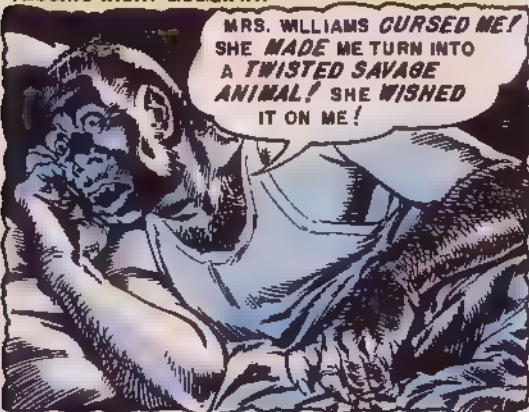
GOOD LORD! WHAT
WHAT'S HAPPENING
TO ME?

'BUT WHEN I GOT HOME THAT NIGHT, AND I LOOKED AT MY HANDS AGAIN, THEY'D GROWN **WORSE!** THEY LOOKED... THEY LOOKED LIKE...'



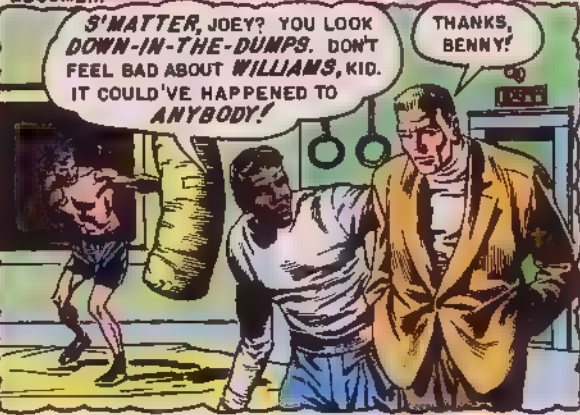
... LIKE THE HANDS OF
A BEAST!

'ALL NIGHT I TOSSED AND TURNED...FEELING MYSELF **CHANGING**...FEELING MY **BODY**...MY **FACE**... GROWING **MORE** AND **MORE** **HIDEOUS** WITH EACH PASSING NIGHT MOMENT...'



MRS. WILLIAMS CURSED ME!
SHE MADE ME TURN INTO A
TWISTED SAVAGE
ANIMAL! SHE WISHED
IT ON ME!


'WHEN I WENT DOWN TO THE GYM THAT AFTERNOON, I KEPT MY HANDS HIDDEN...STUFFED IN MY POCKETS. I DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY ELSE TO SEE HOW **HIDEOUS** THEY'D BECOME...'



S'MATTER, JOEY? YOU LOOK
DOWN-IN-THE-DUMPS. DON'T
FEEL BAD ABOUT **WILLIAMS**, KID.
IT COULD'VE HAPPENED TO
ANYBODY!


THANKS,
BENNY!

'AND LATER, WHEN I WAS UNDRESSING, I SAW MY FEET!'



OH, GOD! MY FEET,
TOO! WHAT'S DOING
THIS TO ME?

'IN THE MORNING, WHEN I GOT UP, I CAREFULLY AVOIDED THE **MIRRORS** AROUND MY PLACE. I DIDN'T WANT TO **SEE** THE **HIDEOUS** MALFORMED MONSTER I'D CHANGED INTO. I GOT SOME SHEETS AND **COVERED** THEM...'



SOB... WHAT AM I GOING
TO DO?

I STAYED IN ALL THAT DAY AND THE NEXT, ALONE, NOT EVEN ANSWERING THE TELEPHONE WHEN IT RANG. AND AS THE HOURS PASSED, AND I KNEW IT WAS BECOMING MORE AND MORE MISSHAPEN AND HORRIBLE, I GREW PANICKY...

MY GUN! WHERE'S MY GUN?

I FOUND THE GUN IN A BUREAU DRAWER. IT WAS LOADED. I WAS GOING TO KILL MYSELF, DOC. I FELT IT WAS THE ONLY WAY OUT. AND THEN I THOUGHT OF YOU. I THOUGHT YOU COULD HELP ME. SO I CALLED...

YES, THIS IS DOCTOR COLEMAN! CAN I HELP YOU?

CAN I COME UP AND SEE YOU, DOC? IT'S...IT'S VERY IMPORTANT. IT'S...A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!

SO THAT'S MY STORY, DOC. NOW YOU KNOW WHY I LOOK LIKE THIS... HIDEOUS... MISSHAPEN... A TWISTED MONSTER!

BUT THAT'S JUST IT, MR. BERKSANT! YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT AT ALL!

I DON'T?! BUT MY HANDS... LOOK AT THEM! THEY'RE UGLY... MISSHAPEN... AND MY FEET...

YOU'RE WRONG, MR. BERKSANT. YOU'RE PERFECTLY NORMAL-LOOKING! THERE ARE NO DISTORTIONS IN YOUR BODY...YOUR FACE...

THE DISTORTIONS ARE IN YOUR MIND! YOU THINK YOU ARE PHYSICALLY MALFORMED BECAUSE YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM A GUILT-COMPLEX CONNECTED WITH MR. WILLIAMS' DEATH AND HIS WIFE'S ACCUSATIONS...

YOU MEAN WHEN SHE CALLED ME A 'TWISTED UGLY BEAST'...?

EXACTLY! YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS MIND, FRAUGHT WITH GUILTY FEELINGS, ACCEPTED HER ANGRY DESCRIPTION OF YOU AND HAS MADE YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND BELIEVE IT!

THEN I'M NOT REALLY UGLY... HIDEOUS? I HAVEN'T CHANGED?

YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED, MR. BERKSANT! YOU'RE STILL A PHYSICAL SPECIMEN. COME! LET ME PROVE IT TO YOU! THERE'S A FULL-LENGTH MIRROR IN THE NEXT ROOM...

NO!

BUT, MR. BERKSANT! SURELY YOU BELIEVE WHAT I SAY!

I BELIEVE YOU, DOC. BUT...WELL... I... I'M AFRAID!

ALL RIGHT! SUIT YOURSELF! I WON'T FORCE YOU TO LOOK! BUT IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO SETTLE YOUR MIND!

I'LL...I'LL LOOK... AS SOON AS I FEEL UP TO IT!

FINE! AND KEEP IN TOUGH WITH ME! PERHAPS, WHEN YOU HAVE TIME, WE CAN GO INTO A DEEPER ANALYSIS OF YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS, FIND OUT WHY YOU LIKE TO FIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE... AND...

SURE, DOC! SURE! THANKS!

JOEY CLOSED THE DOOR TO THE PSYCHIATRIST'S APARTMENT AND STOOD ALONE IN THE DESERTED STREET INHALING THE FRESH COOL NIGHT AIR...

HMMN! I FEEL BETTER ALREADY!

HE STARTED ACROSS THE STREET, HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHOING INTO THE SILENT CLEAR EVENING...

HAVEN'T SLEPT IN FOUR NIGHTS! YAWN! IT'S THE SACK FOR ME!

SUDDENLY, JOEY STOPPED. HE COULD SEE IT IN FRONT OF THE STORE WINDOW, ITS SILVER SURFACE REFLECTING THE STREET LAMP ONTO THE SIDEWALK IN A RECTANGLE OF SOFT YELLOW LIGHT...

A...A MIRROR!

JOEY HESITATED, THEN TOSSED
HIS HEAD, LAUGHING...



...AND STEPPED IN FRONT OF THE
MIRROR...



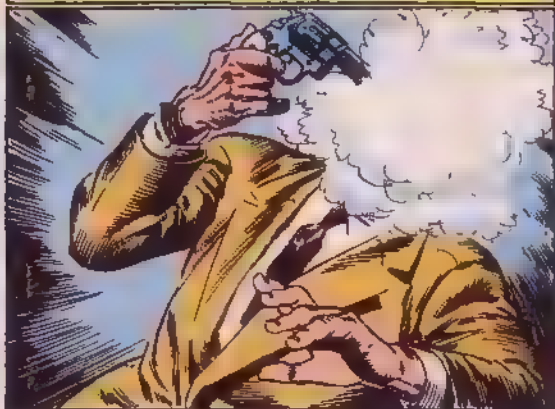
JOEY STARED



JOEY SCREAMED...



... AND TORE THE LOADED GUN FROM HIS POCKET,
PLACED IT AGAINST HIS TEMPLE, AND FIRED...



THE POLICEMAN STOOD BEFORE THE FLOWING SURFACE OF THE
MIRROR, GRIMACING DOWN AT THE LIFELESS BODY ON THE SIDEWALK...



THE STOREKEEPER SHOOK HIS
HEAD...



THE
END. 6

SQUEEZE PLAY

HARRY COWERED AGAINST THE ROUGH CONCRETE PILLAR THAT SUPPORTED THE WEATHER-BEATEN BOARDS OVERHEAD, SUCKING IN THE WARM SUMMER AIR IN GREAT GULPS, TRYING TO CATCH HIS BREATH. THEY WERE AFTER HIM, SOON THEY'D BE SEARCHING DOWN HERE, DOWN IN THE DAMP SAND BENEATH THE BOARDWALK... SEARCHING FOR THE KILLER. HARRY LOOKED AROUND WILDLY. WHERE TO HIDE? WHERE TO RUN? AND THEN HE SAW THE SHIMMERING MASS OF ALMOST NAKED HUMANITY THAT JAMMED THE SUNNY BEACH.

SURE! THEY'LL BE LOOKING FOR A GUY IN A **T-SHIRT** AND **DUNGAREES**. IF I WERE OUT IN THAT CROWD IN A **BATHING SUIT**, THEY'D **NEVER** FIND ME...



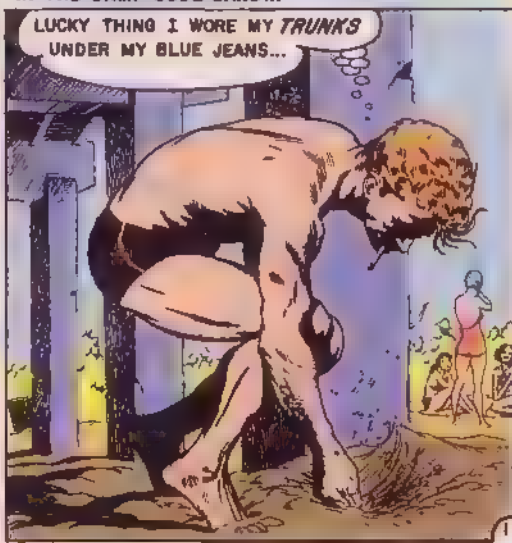
HARRY PULLED HIS T-SHIRT OVER HIS HEAD AND STEPPED OUT OF HIS DUNGAREES...

I'LL BURY MY CLOTHES **HERE** AND COME BACK FOR THEM **LATER...**



HARRY KICKED OFF HIS SHOES AND TUGGED OFF HIS SOCKS. THEN HE KNELT AND SCOOPED A HOLE IN THE DAMP COOL SAND...

LUCKY THING I WORE MY **TRUNKS** UNDER MY **BLUE JEANS**...

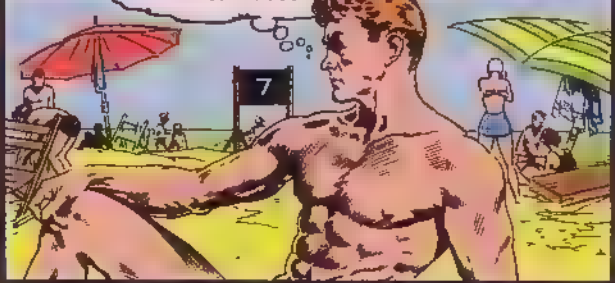


HARRY MOVED OUT OF THE SHADOW OF THE BOARDWALK INTO THE SUNLIGHT. HE THREADED HIS WAY THROUGH THE SPRAWLED SUN-BAKED FIGURES, WOUND AROUND THE SPREAD BLANKETS, MOVED DOWN TOWARD THE MOST CROWDED PART OF THE BEACH...

WELL, CORA. I'M RID OF YOU. I'M FREE AGAIN. AND NEXT TIME I WON'T MAKE SUCH A STUPID MISTAKE. I WON'T GET MYSELF INTO THAT KIND OF A JAM AGAIN...

HARRY GRINNED. HE PICKED AN OPEN SPOT, BETWEEN THE LAUGHING, PERSPIRING GROUPS OF BATHING-SUIT-CLAD PEOPLE AND SAT DOWN. YES, HE WAS FREE OF CORA. SHE WASN'T GOING TO TIE HIM DOWN. SHE WASN'T GOING TO FORCE HIM INTO A SHOT-GUN MARRIAGE. CORA WAS DEAD.

WOMEN! THEY'RE ALL THE SAME. EVERYTHING'S ROSY... ALL FUN... AND THEN THEY START TRYING TO GRAB ON AND HOLD... THEN THEY START TALKING MARRIAGE...



HARRY THOUGHT ABOUT CORA. HOW THEY'D MET... HOW HE'D TAKEN HER OUT... THE GOOD TIMES THEY'D HAD TOGETHER... THE SATURDAY AFTERNOONS... THE NIGHTS. AND THEN, HOW CORA'D STARTED...

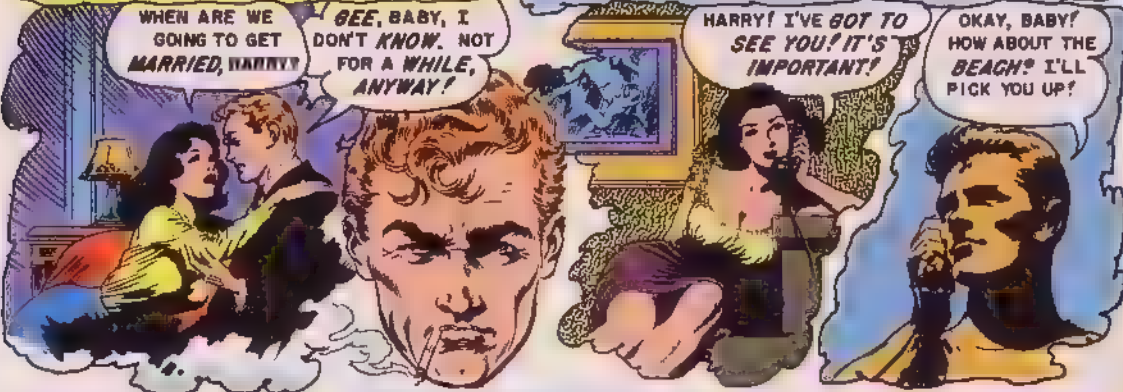
YES, CORA WAS JUST LIKE ALL THE REST. RIGHT AWAY THEY FEEL YOU OWE 'EM SOMETHING. RIGHT AWAY THEY FEEL THEY OWN YOU. HARRY REMEMBERED THIS MORNING... HOW CORA'D PHONED HIM...

WHEN ARE WE GOING TO GET MARRIED, HARRY?

GEE, BABY, I DON'T KNOW. NOT FOR A WHILE, ANYWAY!

HARRY! I'VE GOT TO SEE YOU! IT'S IMPORTANT!

OKAY, BABY! HOW ABOUT THE BEACH? I'LL PICK YOU UP!



HE'D DRESSED IN HIS TRUNKS, PUTTING HIS CLOTHES ON OVER THEM. AND HE'D GONE TO CORA'S HOUSE...

HE'D GONE INTO HER ROOM NERVOUSLY... HER ROOM THAT HAD HELD SUCH FOND MEMORIES...

AGAIN, THE SAME ROUTINE. ALWAYS GLAWING. ALWAYS TRYING TO GRAB A HOLD, TO TIE DOWN, TO SMOTHER...

READY, BABY?

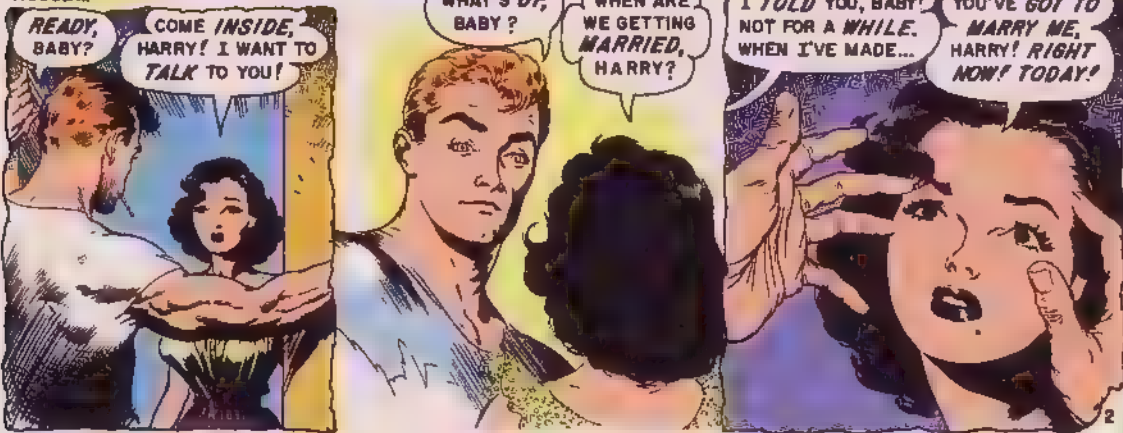
COME INSIDE, HARRY! I WANT TO TALK TO YOU!

WHAT'S UP, BABY?

WHEN ARE WE GETTING MARRIED, HARRY?

I TOLD YOU, BABY! NOT FOR A WHILE. WHEN I'VE MADE...

YOU'VE GOT TO MARRY ME, HARRY! RIGHT NOW! TODAY!



AND THEN SHE'D TOLD HIM. AND HARRY'S BLOOD HAD FROZE IN HIS VEINS. HE'D BEEN TRAPPED. HIS MIND HAD WHIRLED. HE'D THOUGHT FAST. AND THEN HE'D COME UP WITH THE ANSWER...

...SO YOU SEE? YOU'VE GOT TO! YOU'VE JUST GOT TO MARRY ME TODAY!

SURE, HONEY! SURE. WE'LL GET MARRIED, BUT WE CAN'T TODAY! THE LICENSE BUREAU IS CLOSED. IT'S SATURDAY.

HE'D HIDDEN HIS RELIEF AS SHE'D LOOKED AT HIM, HER FACE PALING...

MONDAY, THEN! MONDAY FIRST THING!

SURE! SURE! NOW, G'MON! LET'S GO TO THE BEACH!

THEY'D RIDDEN DOWN ON THE BUS, HARDLY TALKING. ONCE HE'D GLANCED AT HER AND SEEN HER EYES OVERFLOWING WITH TEARS. AND HE'D BRITTED HIS TEETH...

TRAPPED! CONNED! THAT'S WHAT I AM! A STUPID FUMBLING IDIOT! AND NOW, I'M CAUGHT!

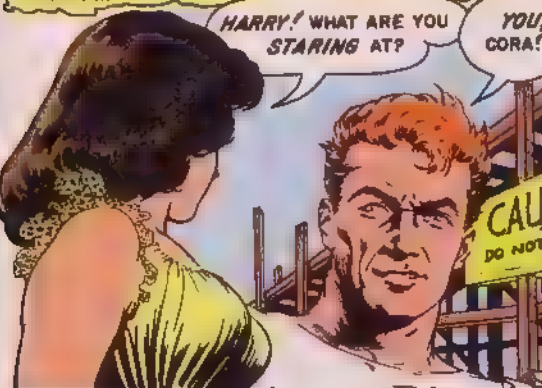
SOS...

THEY'D GOTTEN OFF THE BUS AND STARTED THROUGH THE AMUSEMENT AREA TOWARD THE BOARDWALK. THE MURDY-GURDY MUSIC HAD ECHOED INTO THE HOT NOON AIR... TINNY, CHEAP. EVERYTHING WAS CHEAP. EVERYTHING WAS PHONY. HARRY'D HATED IT ALL...

NOW, I'LL BE TIED DOWN TO A CRUMMY APARTMENT, PUNCHING A TIME-CLOCK, SWEATIN' T' PAY BILLS, AND STAYIN' IN EVERY NIGHT WITH A BAWLIN' BRAT...



SOMEBODY FELL! YEAH! HIM! HARRY! HE'D FALLEN ALL RIGHT! RIGHT ON HIS FACE! SMACK INTO TROUBLE! THAT'S WHAT DAMES WERE! TROUBLE! THIS ONE! THIS CORA! HE'D HAVE TO MARRY HER UNLESS... UNLESS...



HARRY! WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?

YOU, CORA!

THE SCREAMS AND THE ROAR ABOVE HAD MADE HARRY LOOK UP INTO THE DAZZLING SUNLIGHT AT THE BLUR OF THE MURLING ROLLER-COASTER CAR WITH ITS FRENZIED SQUEALING RIDERS...

OOHH! THAT SENDS CHILLS UP MY SPINE, HARRY. I CAN'T STAND ROLLER-COASTERS...

S'MATTER, HONEY? SCARED YOU'LL SEE SOMEBODY FALL?



OF COURSE! IF CORA WERE DEAD, HE'D BE FREE AGAIN. FREE TO RUN WILD AGAIN. AND THIS TIME, HE'D BE CAREFUL. HE GRABBED CORA'S HAND...

G'MON, BABY! WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A RIDE.

NO, HARRY! NO! I DON'T WANT TO GO. I DON'T LIKE ROLLER-COASTERS. I'M SCARED. HARRY! PLEASE...



HE'D PULLED HER TO THE TICKET BOOTH, SHE'D BEGGED HIM...PLEADED...

NO, HARRY. PLEASE. I'M SCARED. HAVE PITY, HARRY!

AW, C'MON, CORA. BE A SPORT? TWO, PLEASE...

THE TICKET-BELLER'D GRINNED AT HARRY. FELLERS WERE ALWAYS DRAGGING THEIR GIRLS ONTO THE ROLLER-COASTER. AND GIRLS WERE ALWAYS SCREAMING THEY WERE SCARED. IT WAS ONE BIG GAME.

HARRY! DON'T MAKE ME! I DON'T WANT TO! HARRY! WHAT ARE YOU TRYIN' TO DO..?

C'MON, CORA. IT'S FUN! YOU'LL SEE!

YEAH. ONE BIG GAME. ONLY, TO HARRY, THIS WAS A GAME OF LIFE OR DEATH. LIFE, BEING FREE. DEATH, BEING MARRIED TO CORA...

HARRY! NO! LET ME GO! HARRY!

ATTA BOY, FELLER. MAKE 'ER GO. WE JUST CAME OFF IT. WOW!

THEY'D GRINNED AT HER, THE PEOPLE ALL AROUND. THEY'D GRINNED AT CORA'S SCREAMING PLEAS. ALL GIRLS SCREAMED, THAT WAS WHAT THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO DO. THEY WENT, IF THEY REALLY WANTED TO... AND THEY MANAGED NOT TO, IF THEY REALLY DIDN'T. BUT CORA WAS GOING. HARRY'D HELD HER IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP...

THE LAST SEAT, CORA. C'MON...

NO! NO! OH, GOD...

AND THEN THE REALIZATION HAD DAWNED UPON CORA. SHE'D SEEN IT IN HARRY'S EYES. THE SUDDEN REALIZATION...AS THE COASTER'D STARTED AWAY...

HE'S GOING TO KILL ME!...HELP ME! HELP ME!

SHUT UP, YOU CRUMMY LITTLE TRAMP...

AND CORA, SCREAMING...AND THE PEOPLE IN THE FORWARD PART OF THE CAR SCREAMING TOO, IGNORING HER, AS THEY STARTED UP THE LONG INCLINE TO THE TOP...

STOP! STOP! PLEASE, STOP! HE'S GOING TO KILL ME! PLEASE! STOP IT!

EEEEEEEEEEEEEE...

HARRY REMEMBERED HOW...AS THEY'D REACHED THE TOP OF THE INCLINE, WHEN ALL EYES WERE STARING AHEAD IN FASCINATION AND FRIGHT DOWN INTO THE STEEL NETWORKED CANYON INTO WHICH THEY WERE STARTING TO PLUNGE... HOW HE'D HIT CORA WITH ALL OF HIS STRENGTH.

OH GOD! STOP! STOP! HE'S GOIN'-N-N-N-G-6-6-6-

AND HARRY REMEMBERED HOW HE'D PUSHED HER FROM THE CAR AS IT HURTTLED DOWNWARD...



...HOW HER BODY'D BOUNCED AGAINST THE BIRDERS, TWISTING AND TURNING AS IT FELL TO THE PAVEMENT FAR BELOW...



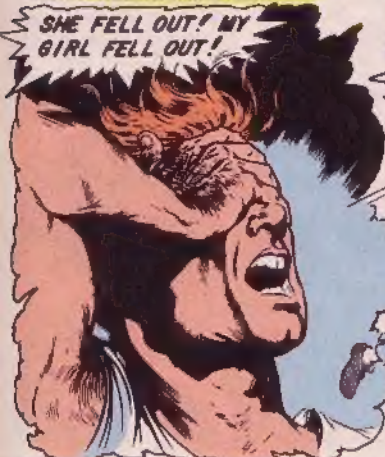
...HOW HE'D GONE INTO HIS ACT, SCREAMING AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS ALL THE WAY IN...

SHE FELL OUT! MY GIRL FELL OUT!

...HOW THE CAR HAD FINALLY GLIDED TO REST, AND THE ROARING AND SCREAMING HAD SUBSIDED, AND ONLY HIS VOICE ECHOED LOUD AND CLEAR...

MY GIRL FELL OUT! FIND HER! FIND HER!

SHE'S DEAD, BUDDY! WE FOUND HER



HARRY REMEMBERED THE FACES... STARING AT HIM...

DEAD?

SOMEBODY CALL A COP. HE DRAGGED HER ON THAT RIDE.



ANGRY FACES... MOVING TOWARD HIM...

IT... IT WAS AN ACCIDENT! I SWEAR...

SHE SAID HE'D KILL HER! I HEARD IT!

ME TOO!

GRAB HIM!



SO HARRY'D RUN. HE'D RUN WILDLY THROUGH THE AMUSEMENT AREA DOWN TOWARD THE BOARDWALK...

THERE HE GOES!

AFTER HIM! HE'S A KILLER!

SOMEBODY GET A COP!



HARRY LOOKED UP. SHRILL VOICES SHOCKED HIM OUT OF HIS REVERIE. A LAUGHING GROUP OF GIRLS WERE SPREADING THEIR BLANKET BESIDE HIM...

HE LOOKED THEM OVER. MMMM. NICE STUFF. ANY OTHER TIME, HE'D CONCENTRATE ON THAT KIND! BUT NOW...HE GLANCED TOWARD THE BOARDWALK. HIS HEART STOPPED...

TWO COPS WERE THERE, WHERE HE'D HIDDEN HIS CLOTHES. THEY HAD HIS T-SHIRT, DUNGAREES, AND SHOES IN THEIR HANDS. THEY WERE SCANNING THE JAMMED BEACH...

OVER HERE A LITTLE MORE, SUE!

DON'T KICK SAND ON IT, BEA!



GOOD LORD!



THEY GOT MY STUFF. I'M SUNK. HOW'LL I GET HOME? I HAVEN'T GOT A NICKEL AND I CAN'T WALK THROUGH THE STREETS LIKE THIS.

PUT THE CAR KEYS IN A SAFE PLACE, NAN!



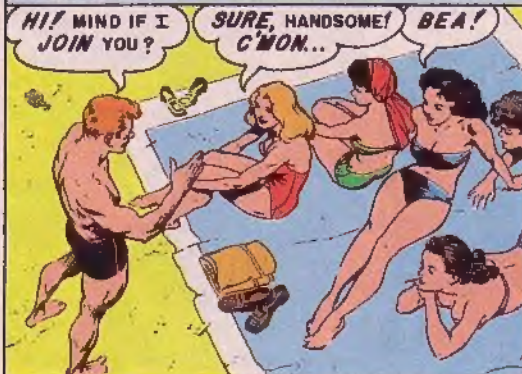
CAR KEYS! HARRY TURNED. HE EYED THE DAMES. THERE WERE FIVE OF THEM, LAUGHING, GIGGLING. IF HE COULD TIE UP WITH THEM, THEY COULD DRIVE HIM HOME. ONE OF THEM LOOKED HIS WAY AND HE SMILED...

AW, IT'S ALL RIGHT, GIRLS. HE'S LONESOME. C'MON OVER, GOOD LOOKIN'!

THANKS! MY NAME'S... ER... JOHNNY?

HELLO, JOHNNY! I'M SUE!

THAT'S BEA, AND THIS IS NAN, I'M ELLA, THAT'S JANET!



AW, IT'S ALL RIGHT, GIRLS. HE'S LONESOME. C'MON OVER, GOOD LOOKIN'!

THANKS! MY NAME'S... ER... JOHNNY?

HELLO, JOHNNY! I'M SUE!

THAT'S BEA, AND THIS IS NAN, I'M ELLA, THAT'S JANET!



THEY WHISPERED AMONG THEMSELVES, GIGGLING. HARRY GRINNED. THEY WERE PUSHOVERS. JUST LIKE GORA'D BEEN. ALL DAMES WERE PUSHOVERS. HARRY'D HAD PLENTY OF EXPERIENCE. HE'D DEVELOPED QUITE A WAY WITH DAMES...

HARRY BALKED. BUT THEY HAD THE CAR. THEY WERE HIS SALVATION...

N-NOT NOW! LATER, MAYBE...

AW, C'MON, BIG BOY! LET'S GO!

GRAB HIM, TARZAN! GIRLS!

...HE-MAN!

THE SUN CAME OUT WHEN YOU GIRLS CAME ALONG! UP TO NOW, IT'S BEEN A PRETTY DULL DAY!



THEY GRABBED HIM BY HIS ARMS, HIS SHOULDERS, HIS WRISTS. THEY TUGGED AND PUSHED AND PULLED HIM DOWN TO THE WATER...

REALLY, GIRLS. I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT!

SHOW US YOUR BACK-STROKE, LOVER!

C'MON!

THE SURF LAPPED AT HIS ANKLES. HARRY SHIVERED. HE TRIED TO EXPLAIN... BUT THEY ONLY LAUGHED, TIGHTENING THEIR HOLDS, SQUEALING, SHRIEKING...

I...I...TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH... I CAN'T SWIM, GIRLS.

PUSH, SUE!

MMM! PULL, BEA! HE'S ALL MUSCLES!

THEY PULLED HIM AND PUSHED HIM, GIGGLING, GASPING, CHATTERING, SHOUTING. HE SCREAMED AS THE WATER LAPPED HIS CHEST...

I CAN'T SWIM! I SWEAR IT! DON'T! PLEASE!

C'MON, JOHNNY! BE A SPORT!

THE WATER WAS OVER HIS HEAD NOW. HIS FEET HUNG, TOES POINTED, SEARCHING FOR SOMETHING TO STAND ON. THEY CLUNG TO HIM, KEEPING HIM UP...

I CAN'T SWIM! TAKE ME BACK! I...

OKAY, MUSCLE-MAN! LET'S SEE YOU DO YOUR STUFF.

LOOK, KIDS!

BACK ON THE BEACH, BY THE GIRL'S BLANKET, FIVE BOYS WAVED A GREETING...

THE FELLERS ARE HERE!

LET'S GO!

HI!

WAIT! DON'T LEAVE ME!

THE GIRLS STRUCK OFF FOR SHORE, WAVING AT THEIR DATES, LAUGHING, SQUEALING, NEVER HEARING HARRY'S ANGUISHED CRIES AS HE THRASHED ABOUT...

HI, JIMMY!

HI, ARMY!

I GOT THE CAR WITH ME, MELVIN!

I...I...CAN'T SWIM! HELP! HELP! HELP!

AND THEY NEVER EVEN TURNED AROUND TO SEE THE WATER POURING INTO HARRY'S MOUTH, HIS STOMACH, HIS LUNGS. THEY NEVER EVEN SAW HIM GO DOWN FOR THE LAST TIME...

GLUGG...G...G...G...

THE END